

PRESS RELEASE



Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure

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Chairman LoBiondo's Statement From Today's Hearing On Coast Guard Mission Performance

Washington, D.C. - The following is U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo's (R-NJ) opening statement from today's hearing on the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General's report on Coast Guard mission performance for fiscal year 2005, and the Service's efforts to balance its assets and personnel to carry out its various missions.

LoBiondo is the Chairman of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation which conducted the hearing. Additional information relating to today's hearing can be accessed at the Committee's website: www.house.gov/transportation

Chairman LoBiondo's Statement

The Subcommittee is meeting this morning to review the Coast Guard's recent mission performance, and, in particular, the Service's efforts to balance its assets and personnel to carry out each of its homeland security and non-homeland security missions.

The Subcommittee has held several hearings to review mission balance and performance during my time as Chairman, and I hope that we will hear from the witnesses on how the Coast Guard is working to successfully meet its goals for each of its many important missions.

Following the terrorist attacks on September 11th, the Coast Guard was given additional responsibilities to secure U.S. ports, vessels and coastal waters.

At the same time, this Subcommittee was concerned about the effects these additional homeland security responsibilities would have on the Coast Guard's capabilities to accomplish its traditional missions.

Section 888 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 prohibits the Secretary from "substantially or significantly" reducing the missions of the Coast Guard or the Service's capability to perform these missions.

This is absolutely critical since the lives of mariners, recreational boaters, and others often depend on the Coast Guard's ability to perform these traditional missions.

Events in recent years have reminded us of the critical importance of the Coast Guard's traditional missions.

The Coast Guard's Search and Rescue mission was prominently displayed in the response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the Gulf Coast last year.

Likewise, the Coast Guard has carried out activities to prevent and respond to oil spills as part of the Service's Marine Environmental Protection mission, including two major oil spills in the Delaware River and in Alaska.

We as a nation simply cannot afford to allow any erosion of the Coast Guard's ability to accomplish these non-homeland security missions.

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 also requires the Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Homeland Security to conduct an annual review of the Coast Guard's mission performance, with a particular emphasis on examining the Service's performance of non-homeland security missions.

In July 2006, the report for fiscal year 2005 was published and has important conclusions.

The report indicated that the Coast Guard's mission resource hours – the number of flight hours for aircraft and underway hours for boats and cutters – has increased for both its homeland security and non-homeland security missions.

It concluded, however, that the Coast Guard is within four percent of its statistically projected maximum level of resource hours.

As a result, the Inspector General found that the Service "will be unable to increase its total resource hours without the acquisition of additional aircraft, cutters, and boats."

The report is saying that we have reached the end of the road – we can't squeeze anything more out of these rapidly failing legacy assets.

Consequently, it is again evident that Congress must accelerate the production of new Deepwater assets.

I am truly concerned about the pace of the Deepwater recapitalization program.

I again take this opportunity to urge my colleagues to support funding levels that will not only allow the Coast Guard to acquire the assets they need, but will allow the program to be accelerated and brought online over the next 15 years rather than the 25 years projected in the revised plan.

The report also revealed that, despite success in increasing mission hours, the Coast Guard still has room for improvement in its performance.

Although the report seems to indicate problems that need to be addressed, I am mindful that the Coast Guard has only a limited number of assets and personnel.

I hope the witnesses' testimony will address whether the Coast Guard and the Inspector General feel that the performance measures are accurately reflecting the job that the Service is doing.

**For additional information, access the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee website at:
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